

ranking member, House Committee on International Relations; F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., chairman, and John Conyers, Jr., ranking member, House Committee on the Judiciary; Porter J. Goss, chairman, and

Nancy Pelosi, ranking member, House Committee on Intelligence. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 7. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

### Remarks at the Tax Family Reunion and an Exchange With Reporters *February 7, 2001*

*The President.* Well, Debora, thank you very much. I'm so honored to see you. And thank you for bringing your son and daughter here. The Vice President and I have been looking forward to this family reunion—tax family reunion. The nice thing about this reunion is, you don't have any annoying relatives to deal with. *[Laughter]* But we're glad to welcome you to the White House.

One of the best parts of the campaign was to meet the hard-working Americans who really make up the backbone of our country. I'd go to the different cities around our great Nation and get off the airplane, and there'd be a tax family. And it was our way to put a face on a piece of important public policy. It was our way to say, behind all the numbers we were talking about and the talk about budget, there were real, live Americans who will benefit.

And I want to thank you all for coming back. I look forward for you to—look forward to thanking you in person. I look forward to you to see the people's house, the place that Laura and I are now fortunate enough to call home.

I have one message for all the folks that were our tax families and all the folks from across the country: You helped me make my case, and now I intend to make good on my promise. I want it to be said that ours is a plan that fulfills a campaign promise. And that's important. A lot of people look toward the political process and say, "Oh, these candidates just say something

and really don't mean it." When I campaigned for meaningful tax relief, I meant it. And tomorrow I'll submit a plan based upon exactly what I said on the campaign trail. I look forward to working with Congress to get the plan passed.

During the course of the campaign, I said it's as if our Nation had erected a toll booth right in the middle of the road of the middle class, making it hard for people to access the middle class, making it hard for hard-working Americans to realize more money for their own. And so we're going to start dismantling that toll booth, brick by brick.

It begins by simplifying the code. We'll reduce the rates from five to four.

It recognizes that our Tax Code is unfair. It is unfair to people who struggle to get ahead. It is unfair for the single mom who lives on the outskirts of poverty, who's working hard to provide for her family. For every additional dollar she makes above \$25,000, she pays a higher marginal rate on that dollar than someone who's wealthy. And that's not right, and it's not fair. It's not what America is all about, as far as I'm concerned. Our tax code makes the code more fair.

It is also fair that everybody who pays taxes should receive relief, and that's why we drop all rates. We drop the top rate, and we drop the bottom rate, and we expand the child credit from \$500 to \$1,000. Under our plan, a family of four making \$50,000 a year will receive a 50 percent cut in the taxes they pay to the Federal

Government. The average tax load will decrease by \$2,000—from \$4,000 to \$2,000.

As Debora said, she calculated our plan, and she saved \$1,000. Maybe for some, the number 1,000 doesn't mean much, and maybe for some, 2,000 doesn't mean much. But for thousands of Americans it means a lot.

I want to assure my friends the tax families who are here that we will submit a budget as expected to the United States Congress, a budget that sets aside all the payroll taxes for Social Security, a budget that sets clear priorities, a budget that pays down the national debt, and a budget that has got room for a meaningful, substantial tax reduction.

And there's a lot of talk about debt in this town, and it should be talked about—national debt. And our plan pays down debt. But I also want the Members of Congress to understand that there are a lot of folks struggling to get ahead who have got high consumer debt. There's a lot of people who are burdened by credit card debt in America. And when you couple that debt overhang with high energy prices, more and more of the backbone of this country struggle to save and struggle to get ahead.

So this tax relief package not only is a way to make sure our economy remains strong; it's a package that understands people need to have more of their own money. It says that with strict budgeting and prioritizing our budget, that when we have surpluses, we must remember who pay the bills in America. And it's these folks who pay the bills in this country. And they deserve relief.

And so I call upon Congress, when they think about tax relief, to think about the members of our tax family who represent all the people of our country, who work hard to get into the middle class and to stay in the middle class.

It's an honor to be your President. I'm so thrilled you all are here to say hello to us. I can't wait to greet you inside.

Thanks for coming, and God bless you all.

#### *Tax Relief Legislation*

*Q.* Mr. President, Republican leaders are pushing for an even larger tax cut, sir. Do you think that's advisable?

*The President.* The tax cut is the right size. I believe it's the right size. And I think it's going to be very important for us and the Members of Congress to work together. But I'm going to make my case that the size of the tax relief package I propose is right.

*Q.* So you're saying it would be inadvisable, in your judgment, based on looking at the numbers of the surpluses, et cetera?

*The President.* I think for those who want to diminish the size of the tax cut, that would be inadvisable, and for those who want to increase the size of the tax cut would be inadvisable. It's the right size.

#### *Office of National AIDS Policy*

*Q.* Could you tell us how it is, sir, that your Chief of Staff didn't know what your plans were for the Office of National AIDS Policy and the President's Initiative for One America?

*The President.* We're going to have a—we're concerned about AIDS inside our White House, make no mistake about it. And ours is an administration that will fight for fair, just law in the country.

Last question.

#### *Middle East*

*Q.* Mr. President, how concerned are you about the outbreak of violence following the election of Ariel Sharon? And also, can you tell us how you might take a different approach than President Clinton and his administration when it comes to Middle East peacemaking?

*The President.* We're going to play the hand we've been dealt. And we're going to play it well, with one thing in mind, that we promote peace in the Middle East. And I've talked to leaders in the Middle

East, urging calm, and so has the Secretary of State.

And I just got off the phone with Prime Minister Barak and told him he fought the valiant fight, and he assured me he would support the Government's attempts to bring calm in the region. And we will continue to reach out to the parties in that region to promote an environment of stability and calm, to give the Sharon government a chance to do what he said he was going to do, which was to try to form a unity

government and reach out to the parties to promote peace in the region.

See you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:37 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Debora Meskauskas, a single mother who met the President during the Presidential campaign, and her children, Bridget and Mark; and Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon of Israel.

## Letter to Congressional Majority Leaders on the Patients' Bill of Rights *February 7, 2001*

*Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. Leader:)*

I was grateful for the opportunity to meet with you last month at the White House to discuss our shared goal of passing a strong Patients' Bill of Rights. Over the last two weeks my staff and I have met with Members of Congress from both parties, and I believe that we have an opportunity to work together to enact legislation this year to address this important issue. I am writing to ask for your support, and for the support of all Members of Congress, for a bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights to provide all Americans with protections in managed care.

As Governor of Texas, I worked with Democrats and Republicans to enact some of the strongest patient protection laws in this country. My goal now in seeking Federal legislation is simple: I want to ensure that all patients receive needed medical care and that doctors are allowed to make medical decisions.

To achieve these goals, patients should have the right to an independent medical review of a health plan's decision to deny care. This review should be conducted by medical experts outside the health plan and must be binding on the health plan. I also believe that, following an independent

medical review of a health plan's decision to deny care, patients who have been wrongly denied medical care should be allowed to hold their health plans liable in Federal court.

I cannot support a plan, however, that encourages unnecessary or frivolous litigation. Expensive litigation, and the resulting rise in health care costs, would only make it more difficult for Americans to afford health care coverage in the first place. I believe it is possible to provide patients a meaningful remedy when they have been wrongly denied care, without causing other Americans to lose coverage. A responsible remedy for patients should protect employers from the high costs of being subject to multiple causes of action in multiple venues and should provide a reasonable cap on damages.

As you requested, I have enclosed the principles by which I will gauge any piece of Federal legislation. I do not believe that any bill currently before the Congress meets all of these principles. However, I applaud the efforts of Members on both sides of the aisle who have stepped forward to address this issue. I believe we can work together to reach bipartisan agreement this year on a strong Patients' Bill of Rights